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Police crack down on 'cockroach' protest in Delhi as group says leaders detained

Summary

Tens of thousands of security personnel have been deployed and **roads barricaded** in Delhi to stop the latest Cockroach Janta Party demonstration

The group says its leader, **Abhijeet Dipke**, is among hundreds reportedly detained since Friday evening - **watch the moment police approach Dipke**

Dipke - who has said he is **prepared to go to jail** - started the movement in May **almost as a joke** in response to a remark by India's Chief Justice Surya Kant, who had likened jobless youngsters to "cockroaches"

Momentum built as **the movement tapped into anger** over unemployment, exam paper leaks and government accountability - today's protest calls for electoral reforms and the **resignation of India's election chief**

Delhi feels like it is under siege, **writes the BBC's Geeta Pandey at the scene**

Its last major protest in July saw violent clashes with police and **forced India's education minister to resign**

1:34

'Cockroach' protester detained minutes after BBC interview

1:11

'Cockroach' leaders say they have been detained ahead of march

Live Reporting

Edited by Manish Adhikary in London and produced by Sharanya Hrishikesh and Zoya Mateen in Delhi, with Geeta Pandey and Azadeh Moshiri reporting from Delhi

10:07

Some detained journalists have been released

News outlet Newslaundry says its three journalists detained by the Delhi Police have been released.

Newslaundry alleged that its reporters were driven around Delhi for more than an hour before being released. "We will continue to report," it wrote on X.

The journalists were detained earlier today, with Newslaundry also alleging that police had seized their work phones. The police has not commented on this.

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10:06

CJP says it has a back-up plan after leaders detained

Abhijeet Dipke and other prominent faces may be detained, but the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) says someone else is ready to lead today's protest in Delhi.

The group says its organisation in-charge, Ajinkya Shinde, will take charge of the planned gathering at Jantar Mantar.

Dipke appeared to have seen this coming. "If you're watching this video, it means we have already been arrested," he said in a message recorded on Friday night and shared by the CJP on X a short while ago.

We have been reporting that it is **not clear where Dipke and two other detained CJP leaders are**. Police have also been turning away or detaining protesters at the planned protest site. We will bring you more updates on the protests as we get them.

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09:56

Watch: Police board 'cockroach' movement leader's flight to detain him

As we've been reporting, Abhijeet Dipke, the leader of the Cockroach movement, has been detained after flying from Mumbai to Delhi for the protest.

"It was nice to know you all. You can see where the nation is heading. They are here to arrest us directly from the flight," he says as authorities board the plane he and other movement leaders are travelling on.

"This is dictatorship," he says, in a video posted online by the Cockroach Janta Party.

"Come arrest us. We are here to be arrested," he says in Hindi to the approaching officers. "We are not afraid of you."

The officers then approach him, and ask the person filming to put their phone down. "You've been denied the permission to protest," an officer says.

The Cockroach Janta Party says Dipke and other movement leaders have been detained. Their whereabouts remain unclear, and authorities in Delhi have not confirmed the detentions or provided details.

Before his detention, Dipke said on social media that the mass detention of protesters and the shutdown of Delhi were "not signs of strength, but of a leader terrified of his own people".

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09:50

CJP alleges its leaders detained at 'undisclosed location'

We've just heard more from the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) about its three leaders detained by police earlier today.

The group alleges its founder, Abhijeet Dipke, along with Saurav Das and Ashutosh Ranka, have been taken to an undisclosed location.

It claims the three are being denied access to lawyers and have been cut off from contact with others.

We had reported earlier that its **not clear where the three men are** after they were detained from the flight they were on.

Delhi Police have yet to publicly comment on the allegation.

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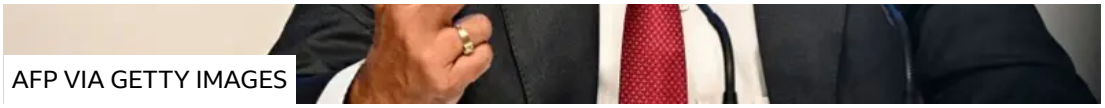
Why are there calls for the election chief to resign?



AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Gyanesh Kumar, India's Chief Election Commissioner

At the centre of today's protests and the crackdown is one name: Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar. Under Kumar's leadership, India's election commission has undertaken a mammoth exercise to update electoral rolls nationwide - it said this was a routine exercise to weed out dead, duplicate or ineligible voters.

But in many states, the exercise has been shrouded in controversy, with tens of thousands of people alleging they have been wrongly removed.

Overall, more than 130 million names have been removed from the rolls.

The Cockroach Janta Party - and opposition parties - accuse Kumar of favouring Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the way the electoral rolls are being updated.

They have also alleged irregularities in the way Kumar has been functioning, citing a recent newspaper report that said his fellow Election Commissioners had objected to decisions allegedly taken without their knowledge.

The BJP and the Election Commission have denied allegations of favouritism.

The commission also said in a statement after the report that "differing views" were a normal part of the "decision-making process".

Read more about the controversy **here**.

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09:28

Young protesters say they are undeterred by police crackdown

Azadeh Moshiri
Reporting from Delhi

Some protesters who were stopped and turned back from Jantar Mantar have been sitting and waiting in different parts of central Delhi. We spoke

to some of them.

"Why are you detaining people who are protesting peacefully? We are only here demanding Gyanesh Kumar's resignation. Protesting is a democratic right, but I don't think we have that any more," one protester said.

Another said that protesters were determined to hold their ground.

"We have been coming here every day for the past week. If they manage to stop us today, we will come again tomorrow."

A protester told the BBC that if stopped today, he will return tomorrow

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09:18

Journalists allegedly detained while covering protests

At least two Indian news outlets have said that their journalists have been detained by Delhi Police while covering today's protest in the capital.

Newslaundry said three of its reporters - Ashwine Singh, Savyasachi Astha and Anmol Pritam - were detained and their work phones seized.

In a post on X, the outlet alleged that the journalists were put on a bus with around 30 people, including protesters.

Scroll has also reported the detention of one of its journalists.

It's unclear where the journalists have been taken or why they were detained. Delhi Police have not publicly commented on these detentions.

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09:11

Opposition leader Kejriwal accuses Modi of 'crushing democracy'

Former Delhi chief minister and leader of the Aam Aadmi Party Arvind Kejriwal took to X to seek the resignation of India's election chief Gyanesh Kumar.

“This is worse than the Emergency,” Kejriwal said, comparing the government’s crackdown on protesters to the time when former prime minister Indira Gandhi declared a nationwide Emergency in 1975 suspending civil liberties.

He also criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying "we are living under an absolute dictatorship".

Modi has not commented on the protests or the crackdown yet, but his party leader Nitin Nabin had earlier **criticised opposition parties**, saying they were trying to destabilise the country.

AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Kejriwal has on several occasions accused the Modi government of "stealing votes", allegations which the BJP continues to deny

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09:04

In pictures: Days of protests lead to Delhi showdown

Over the past few days, the CJP, opposition parties and student activists have held several protests across India - including in capital Delhi. Although organised separately, the protesters had a common demand: the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar.

AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Large crowds gathered in Mumbai last Friday for the first protest called by the CJP against the Chief Election Commissioner

AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

The CJP also held a protest in Bengaluru earlier this week

REUTERS

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has led opposition protests demanding Kumar's resignation over the past few days. He has been briefly detained at least four times this week

EPA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Student activist Neha Bora was seen smiling even as police detained her during protests. Bora has been leading demonstrations by Left-wing student groups demanding the resignation of Kumar.

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08:57

Police urging protesters to follow orders

Delhi Police said on Friday that it had denied the Cockroach Janta Party permission to protest at Jantar Mantar, saying organisers should have applied at least 10 days in advance.

The police also warned of legal action against those violating restrictions, citing alleged violations during the July protest and concerns about law and order.

More than 1,000 people had reportedly been detained across Delhi since late on Friday.

The BBC's Geeta Pandey, who has been at the protest site since early morning, says announcements are being repeatedly made over loudspeakers, urging people to cooperate with police and maintain order.

The authorities also warn that prohibitory orders are in place and that anyone obstructing police work could face legal action.

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08:40

The faces of the Cockroach Janta Party

HINDUSTAN TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

(From left) Saurav Das, Abhijeet Dipke and Ashutosh Ranka

As we have been reporting, the three main leaders of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) have been detained as they landed in Delhi.

The best-known face from the protest is Abhijeet Dipke, the founder of CJP.

Dipke, who recently completed a master's in public relations at Boston University, started the CJP **almost as a joke** in response to a stray comment by India's Chief Justice Surya Kant.

However, it grew beyond's anyone's imagination and its first protest in Delhi ended with the resignation of a powerful federal minister.

Other prominent faces include spokespersons and CJP co-convenors Ashutosh Ranka and Saurav Das. Ranka, who earlier worked with McKinsey & Co. in London, was once associated with the opposition Aam Aadmi Party.

He had also worked on issues related to education and public policy in his home state Rajasthan before joining the CJP.

Das, a former journalist who mainly covered legal issues and investigations, is now one of the CJP's most recognisable faces. He is active on social media, where he often makes headlines with his sharp comments and replies to critics.

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08:34

All roads to the protest site sealed

Geeta Pandey
Reporting from Jantar Mantar, Delhi

Security continues to be extremely tight at Jantar Mantar, the planned protest site, where thousands of police and paramilitary personnel remain deployed.

The entire road has been sealed off with huge metal barricades, with no-one allowed through, including journalists covering the protest.

Drones can be seen flying overhead, while at some places, police officers have formed human chains to stop reporters from stepping onto the road.

There is little sign of anyone being allowed anywhere near the protest site.

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08:30

Abhijeet Dipke: The man behind the 'cockroach' movement

Just a few months ago, Abhijeet Dipke was a little-known 30-year-old student in Boston, spending his days watching documentaries and playing video games.

Today, he's a familiar face in India, mobbed by supporters asking for selfies and leading a movement that has challenged Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

Dipke, who previously worked with the opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), had just completed a master's degree at Boston University when he **posted a question** on X in May: "What if all cockroaches come together?"

GETTY IMAGES

He says the post, written while playing a video game, was spontaneous. It came after India's chief justice compared some unemployed young people

to cockroaches - remarks he later said had been misinterpreted.

The post went viral, and the Cockroach Janta Party was born. In July, Dipke watched from the stage as protesters celebrated the resignation of India's education minister.

A self-described introvert, Dipke has talked about how he would much rather be alone in his room. But for now, he is at the centre of one of India's most closely watched protest movements.

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08:27

Modi's BJP accuses opposition groups of trying to destabilise India

ANI

BJP President Nitin Nabin has blamed opposition leaders for the protest and called them "anarchic"

As the chaos around the protests continues, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has accused opposition groups of trying to destabilise India at the behest of foreign forces.

BJP president Nitin Nabin, speaking at a press conference in Delhi, described the opposition as "anarchic" and accused them of refusing to accept the people's verdict and pursuing political agendas to create instability.

He alleged that the associates of Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi and Aam Aadmi Party leader Arvind Kejriwal were leading Saturday's protests.

Aam Aadmi Party leader Arvind Kejriwal were leading Saturday's protests.

He didn't name the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), which is the main organisation that called for protests - the CJP is not a registered political party but is a collective that now works as a pressure group.

Nabin said India was making progress despite global crises, adding that the opposition could not "digest India's growth, progress, and advancement".

He warned that their efforts would fail, saying: "Indian democracy possesses immense strength, and the patriots of this nation will unite to thwart your designs."

Opposition parties, mainly the Congress, have been out on the streets this week, demanding the election chief's resignation.

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08:17

Glimpses of central Delhi

As we've been reporting, thousands of police and paramilitary personnel have been deployed across Delhi, with people being detained near the protest site.

The heavy security presence is also affecting the city's residents, who are having to deal with road diversions and much longer travel times.

GETTY IMAGES

People who have managed to reach the protest site are being detained

REUTERS

A milkman being asked to take a different route amid diversions

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08:14

Location of CJP leaders unknown after being detained on flight

The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) says its founder Abhijeet Dipke and two other leaders, Saurav Das and Ashutosh Ranka, were detained by police shortly after their flight from Mumbai landed in Delhi.

In a video shared by the group, police officers appear to enter the aircraft, while Dipke can be heard saying he had expected to be arrested.

But what happened after that is less clear.

We still don't know where the three men currently are. Police have not publicly explained the reasons for their detention.

And it's not just the CJP leadership. There are reports of many more people being detained across Delhi and elsewhere as police try to prevent protesters from gathering.

Getting a clear picture of what's happening is also proving difficult, with mobile internet services suspended across parts of central Delhi.

For now, the whereabouts of Dipke and his colleagues remain unclear. We'll update you as we get more details.

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08:11

What is SIR and why is it controversial?

At the heart of today's protests is a simple but crucial question: who gets to vote in India?

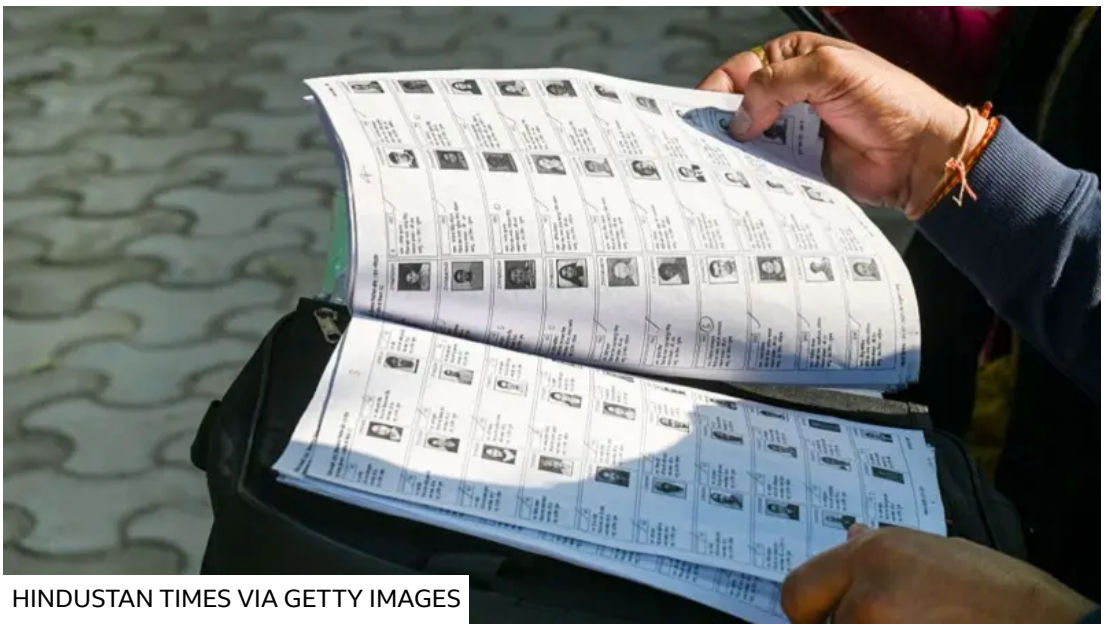
The Election Commission is carrying out a massive check of voter lists, known as the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) which it says will weed out dead, duplicate or ineligible voters.

Unlike routine updates, it involves officials going door to door to verify voters and draw up fresh lists.

The exercise began in Bihar in June 2025 and has since spread to most of India. And the numbers are striking.

More than 130 million names - about 13% of India's electorate - have been left off draft voter lists across 30 states and federal territories. Critics fear eligible voters could lose their right to vote.

Opposition parties also accuse the government of using the exercise to check people's citizenship and benefit their party. The government denies this, while the Election Commission says SIR is simply about keeping voter lists accurate.



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08:04

Why are these protests a big deal?

The protests have become a wider test for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

Saturday's protests are the latest in a series of demonstrations that opposition parties have been doing - but given that the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) is not a registered political party, its call is expected to attract people across all backgrounds, not just party supporters.

The protests also come just months before crucial state elections, with the controversial electoral roll revisions giving opposition parties a strong issue to rally their supporters.

It would also be a test of the CJP's popularity - the last protests it held in Delhi forced a federal minister to step down. The question now, experts say, is whether it can sustain that momentum.

The government's response has raised the stakes further. Authorities have announced harsh travel restrictions, activists have been detained, and opposition leaders have also been pushed back and detained while protesting this week.

It's still unclear what will happen next.

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08:03

'We are ready to go to jail' - CJP leader Dipke before detention

Hours before his detention, Cockroach Janta Party founder Abhijeet Dipke told media that even the prospect of jail or being charged under national security laws would not stop supporters of the movement.

"If you think you can stop us by threatening us with jail or trying to intimidate us with the fear of imprisonment, you are mistaken.

"We are ready to go to jail," he told news agency ANI while waiting for his flight to leave Mumbai for Delhi.

“We will continue to fight for democracy and will ensure [Chief Election Commissioner] Gyanesh Kumar’s resignation,” he said.

In a separate post on social media, he said the mass detention of protesters and the shutdown of Delhi were “not signs of strength, but of a leader terrified of his own people”.

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07:58

'We were rote learning our lawyer's number'

Geeta Pandey
Reporting from Jantar Mantar, Delhi

One of the early protesters, Sabika Muzaffar, arrived with her mother at Jantar Mantar and said they expected to be detained.

“On the way to the protest site, instead of reciting hymns and verses as we usually do, my mother and I were rote learning our lawyer’s number.”

She said that showing up to protest was "her way of defending the country and its democracy".

A few minutes after the BBC spoke to Muzaffar, police took her away in what appeared to be a detention.

Sabika Muzaffar travelled from neighbouring Haryana state with her mother to take part in Saturday's protest

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